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ABSTRACT

The many changes in the world's social structure require corresponding changes in education. One across-the-system change that needs to be given emphasis is the development of school libraries. The current state of the world's school libraries is generally unsatisfactory. This view is based on the results of an international comparative study of school libraries. Based on the responses from authoritative sources in 64 countries, the study found that school libraries were still absent in some countries, especially in primary schools; that school libraries were given a low priority in education; that the school library was seen as having only a supplementary role in the educational process; and that many teacher-librarians had only minimal training for their positions. There are many challenges ahead in developing school libraries worldwide. This paper puts forward some recommendations and suggestions for international organizations and associations. These recommendations include the need for setting bold yet realistic targets, greater attention to be paid to convincing policy makers about the role of school libraries, ensuring the free and widespread dissemination of information about libraries, and nurturing the development of school libraries in all countries. A list of the countries responding to the survey is appended. (Contains 6 references.) (Author)

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The State of the World's School Libraries

by Diljit Singh

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THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S SCHOOL LIBRARIES

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ABSTRACT

The many changes in the world's social structure require corresponding changes in education. One across-the-system change that needs to be given emphasis is the development of school libraries.

The current state of the world's school libraries is generally unsatisfactory. This view is based on the results of an international comparative study of school libraries. Based on the responses from authoritative sources in sixty-four countries, the study found that school libraries were still absent in some countries, especially in primary schools, that school libraries were given a low priority in education, that the school library was seen as having only a supplementary role in the educational process, and that many teacher-librarians had only minimal training for their jobs.

There are many challenges ahead in developing school libraries worldwide. This paper puts forward some recommendations and suggestions for international organizations and associations. These recommendations include the need for setting bold yet realistic targets, greater attention to be paid to convincing policy makers in countries about the role of school libraries, ensuring the free and widespread dissemination of information about libraries, and nurturing the development of school libraries in all countries.

Introduction

The last two and half decades have seen many changes in the world's social structure. Nations that were once economic powers have had their dominance reduced, large republics have broken up into smaller nations, numerically small religious and cultural groups have become more significant, the green revolution has spread rapidly, and technology, in particular the computer, is playing a major role in every walk of life. In addition, information is becoming a crucial factor in the economic, political, cultural, ecological and technical arenas.

In short, the world is changing. It is the responsibility of the schools of today to produce citizens of tomorrow who can survive in this new world order. A citizen of tomorrow needs a higher quality of education, which includes not only the basic 3 Rs, but also knowledge, attitudes

and skills that address the changes the world is witnessing. Yet the education systems in most countries are still based on the agricultural economies of the past. In many developing and less developed countries, the rate of economic development has outpaced the changes in education. Changes, if any, have basically consisted of administrative restructuring, introduction of new subjects, curriculum revisions, revised testing procedures and other isolated changes. Areas which cut across the curriculum or the whole education system have generally been neglected. Few countries have considered, much less implemented, complete overhauls in their systems of education.

The school library is one across-the-system element that has been linked to increasing the quality of education. Many reviews of research studies on school libraries conclude that the presence and active use of a school library can significantly influence student achievement (Mahar 1983, Didier 1985, Haycock 1987, Woolls 1990, Haycock 1992). Irrespective of whether the role of the library is to encourage students to read widely in their spare time or to ensure that students are effective users of information, the school library has an important role to play in education and in national development. Unlike the isolated changes that have been introduced, the school library is not a new subject to be introduced into the curriculum. The domain of the school library cuts across the curriculum. The school library today is no longer a luxury in education; it is a necessity.

Yet the state of world's school libraries is generally unsatisfactory. This is the view based on an international survey of school libraries carried out in 1993. This paper highlights the results of the relevant portions of the study. [The full study is not reported here, and the interested reader is referred to (Singh, 1993)]. This paper goes on to suggest means for the greater development, as seen from a developing country perspective. It is hoped that the results of this study and the recommendations in this paper can be used as a starting point in the efforts to improve the school libraries and, in turn, the quality of education worldwide.

The Study

An international survey of school libraries was carried out in 1993 as part of a Ph.D. dissertation requirement. The main aim of the study was to examine school library systems across nations. In order to do so, a series of indicators and variables for the comparison of school libraries was first established by surveying thirty leaders in the field of school librarianship from twenty-nine countries. The indicators and variables were then used as a basis to survey the

current state of school libraries internationally.

The full study basically involved the following steps, some of which were carried out concurrently with others:

1. Selected library and education literature from the past twelve years was first analyzed to obtain an overview of the existing state of knowledge on school libraries internationally.
2. A survey of the literature was also carried out to establish a preliminary list of indicators and variables for the comparison of school libraries internationally.
3. This preliminary list of indicators and variables was presented, in the form of a questionnaire, to an international panel of experts on school librarianship to obtain a professional judgement on a valid set of indicators for international comparisons.
4. An authoritative source of information on school libraries was identified in each of the approximately 190 countries of the world with the assistance of the country's embassy in the United States or the country's representative to the United Nations.
5. The indicators and variables derived in step 3 above were used to formulate a questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to the official sources identified in step 4, for them to describe the current status of school libraries in their respective countries.
6. In the meantime, information on the demographic, economic and social conditions of the countries was compiled from authoritative published sources.
7. The information obtained in step 5 above was correlated with selected demographic, economic and social indicators obtained in step 6 for the countries, to determine if any relationships existed.
8. The information obtained in steps 1 and 5 was verified, where possible, through analysis of documents supplied by the respondents.
9. The information obtained in step 5 was corroborated, where possible, with information obtained from interviews with international participants at the 21st International Association of School Librarianship conference in Belfast.
10. All available relevant information was then synthesized to answer the research questions of the study.

The Findings

Of the 185 questionnaires sent out in January 1993, 64 countries replied by the end of April, giving a return rate of 34.8% (see Appendix A for list of responding countries). Based on

the analysis of responses from these sixty-four countries, the findings can be summarized in the tables that follow. The tables show the percentage of countries which gave the corresponding responses; more detailed information can be found in the original study report of Singh, 1993.

Table 1

Library Facilities in Schools

Extent of Libraries within the Schools	Primary	Secondary
All schools have centralized libraries	12.5 %	28.1 %
At least half of schools have centralized libraries	45 %	70 %
None of the schools have centralized libraries	16 %	1.6 %

Access to Any Library (Inside or Outside the Schools)	Primary	Secondary
All primary schools have access to some form of library	52.8 %	67.3 %
At least half of schools have access to some form of library	73.6 %	80 %
None of the schools have access to some form of library	3.8 %	0 %

Table 2

Philosophy of School Library

Country's Philosophy on School Library	Percentage
The school library has a central role in education	21.8 %
The school library has a supplementary role in education	43.6 %
The school library is a good thing to have when resources allow for it	32.7 %

Table 3

Ranking of Library among School Services

Service	Rank
Textbooks	1
Science Laboratories and Equipment	2
Guidance and Counselling	3
Sports and Athletics	4
Vocational/Technical Education	5
Health Services	6
School Library	7
Special Education	8

Countries which Ranked School Library as	Percentage
Highest	1.8%
Lowest	9.1%

Table 4

Role of School Library

Role	Percentage
No defined role	16.7 %
As a place for pupils to study when they are free	3.7 %
For recreational reading, viewing and/or listening	11.1 %
For enrichment of the learning process	59.3 %
For instruction requiring library materials and/or services	3.7 %
For finding specific information and ideas	3.7 %

Table 5

Inclusion of School Libraries in Educational Development Plans

Inclusion in Educational Development Plans	Percentage
School libraries INCLUDED in development plans	89.1 %
School libraries NOT included in development plans	10.9 %

Table 6

Schools with Teacher-Librarians

Presence of Teacher-Librarians	Primary	Secondary
With teacher-librarian in ALL schools	13.5 %	21 %
With teacher-librarian in SOME schools	67 %	75 %
WITHOUT any teacher-librarians at all	19.5 %	4 %

Table 7

Schools with Full-Time Teacher-Librarians

Full-Time Teacher-Librarians	Primary	Secondary
WITH full-time teacher-librarians	1.5 %	10 %
WITHOUT full-time teacher-librarians	98.5 %	90 %

Table 8

Role of Teacher-Librarians

Role	Percentage
No defined role	31.5 %
As a librarian, making resources available to teachers and students	27.8 %
As a specialist teacher, instructing teachers and students on how to use the library	29.6 %
As an instructional partner, jointly planning and implementing the curriculum with teachers	5.6 %

Table 9

Education of Teacher-Librarians

Level of Education/Training in Librarianship	Percentage
No special training	21.8 %
In-service training only	27.3 %
Certificate or equivalent level	14.5 %
Diploma or associate degree level	12.7 %
Bachelor's or Master's degree or higher	1.8 %

Table 10

Collections of School Libraries

Type of Material	Primary	Secondary
Print materials	100 %	100 %
Audio materials and associated equipment	42.9 %	50.0 %
Visual materials and associated equipment	37.6 %	40.7 %
Electronic materials and associated equipment	14.3 %	25.9 %
Communication equipment	6.1 %	13.0 %

Table 11

Existence of Standards and/or Guidelines

Existence of Mandatory Standards for School Libraries	Percentage
Yes	36.4 %
No	63.6 %

Existence of Guidelines for School Libraries	Percentage
Yes	70.9 %
No	29.1 %

Table 12

Existence of Professional Associations

Existence of Professional Associations for School Libraries	Percentage
Yes	45.5 %
No	54.5 %

Table 13

Access to School Library

Days on which School Library is Open	Primary	Secondary
During certain school days only	23.6 %	14.8 %
Every school day	72.3 %	77.8 %
Every school day and during holidays	2.1 %	5.6 %

Table 14

Central Organization for School Libraries

Central Organization for Advising, Administering or Coordinating School Libraries	Percentage
With central organization	75 %
No central organization	25 %

Table 15

Evaluation of School Libraries

Existence of formal means of evaluation	Percentage
Means of evaluation exists	47 %
No means of evaluation	53 %

Table 16

Overall Status of School Libraries - Policymakers

Level of Satisfaction	Percentage
Very satisfied	0 %
Generally satisfied	43 %
Minimally satisfied	30 %
Not at all satisfied	27 %

Table 17

Overall Status of School Libraries - Users

Level of Satisfaction	Percentage
Very satisfied	0 %
Generally satisfied	37 %
Minimally satisfied	43 %
Not at all satisfied	20 %

Table 18

High Positive Correlations with Socio-Economic Factors

Library Variable	Socio-Economic Factor	Correlation Coefficient
Percentage of primary schools with no libraries	Percentage of population under age of 15	+ 0.78
Percentage of secondary schools with no libraries	Student:Teacher ratio at primary level	+ 0.71
Percentage of primary schools with no libraries	Student:Teacher ratio at primary level	+ 0.69
Presence of communication equipment in secondary school libraries	Number of telephones per 100 inhabitants in country	+ 0.68
Presence of electronic materials and equipment in secondary school libraries	Number of telephones per 100 inhabitants in country	+ 0.67
Presence of electronic materials and equipment in secondary school libraries	Gross national product (GNP) per capita of country	+ 0.63
Presence of visual materials and projection equipment in primary school libraries	Percentage of GNP spent on education by country	+ 0.63
Presence of electronic materials and equipment in secondary school libraries	Energy consumption per capita in country	+ 0.62
Percentage of secondary schools with no libraries	Percentage of population under age of 15	+ 0.60

Table 19

High Negative Correlations with Socio-Economic Factors

Library Variable	Socio-Economic Factor	Correlation Coefficient
Percentage of primary schools with no libraries	Gross national product (GNP) per capita of country	- 0.80
Provision of services by school library to groups of different cultures or backgrounds	Number of telephones per 100 inhabitants in country	- 0.65
Percentage of primary schools with no libraries	Number of telephones per 100 inhabitants in country	- 0.62
Presence of audio materials in secondary school libraries	Student:Teacher ratio at primary level	- 0.61
Presence of visual materials in secondary school libraries	Student:Teacher ratio at primary level	- 0.60
Percentage of secondary schools with no libraries	Gross national product (GNP) per capita of country	- 0.58

Table 20

Factors Encouraging the Development of School Libraries

Factor	Rank
Finance	1
Role of a central organization	2
Education/Training of Teacher-Librarians	3
Personal interest and efforts of individuals	4
Changes in the educational environment	5

Table 21

Factors Hindering the Development of School Libraries

Factor	Rank
Lack of finances	1
Lack of trained personnel	2
Lack of physical facilities	3
Inadequate collections and materials	4
Administrative and organizational problems Lack of commitment among the authorities	Joint 5

Recommendations

The above findings suggest that the state of the world's school libraries is far from satisfactory. While the achievements of international organizations and associations, such as the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL), in the development of school libraries are to be commended, there is still much that needs to be done. The international organizations and associations need to play an even greater role if school libraries are to contribute significantly in preparing the citizens of tomorrow.

International organizations cannot continue to do what has always been done in the past, perhaps a little more or a little better, and expect it to produce wonderful results. The efforts of the past have produced commendable results, but the world is changing and we need to change our approaches accordingly.

International organizations need to set bold but yet realistic targets for school libraries worldwide. A few recommendations and suggestions are put forward below, based on a developing country perspective. These recommendations and suggestions are primarily directed towards the members of IASL but are equally applicable to UNESCO, the World Bank, IFLA, and all other international agencies and organizations.

Analyzing the Current Picture. We need first to analyze the current research, and what it tells us about the current state of school libraries internationally. We may need to verify some of the existing information, carry out further studies and even change our knowledge base, if necessary. Armed with this knowledge, we need to intensify our efforts to improve the state of the world school libraries. We must be brave in setting bold targets. For example, we should aim for the globalization of school libraries so that by the year 2005, every school shall have a school library.

Convincing policy makers. The key policy makers in each country can foster or hinder the development of school libraries. We need to identify these key officials, and convince them of the role and importance of school libraries. The study described earlier indicated that the personal interests of individuals can be a major factor in the development of school libraries. The study also indicated that the lack of commitment among the authorities is a barrier to development. Officials in the Education Departments, National Libraries, and Library Associations, as well as other interested leaders must be coaxed and influenced by all possible means until they are committed to the development of school libraries. A central organization within the Ministry or Department of Education or the National Library in each country must be staffed by committed people who are responsible for the development of school libraries. We also need to develop a core group of volunteer change agents in every country. IASL should set itself a target of 10,000 members, with every country of the world represented in its membership, by the year 2000. These members must be linked into a network, whether electronic or print, so that their efforts can be synergized to achieve the goals.

Widespread dissemination of information. Information is a key factor in the development of school libraries. It is ironic that while the developed nations are suffering from an information explosion and key officials are literally drowning in information, the developing countries are starved of information. While we celebrate the end of political apartheid, we must ensure that an information apartheid never materializes. IASL must be committed towards ensuring the free and

widespread dissemination of information about school libraries. The recommendations of the 1993 IFLA pre-conference on school libraries need to be disseminated as widely as possible. New publications as well as old but relevant materials must be made available to the less developed nations. Old copies of journals can be donated to less developed countries. Old but useful books can be reprinted for worldwide dissemination. Summaries of research findings should be widely disseminated. Research should be encouraged at all levels and in all countries with simple how-to-do guides. Locals in developing countries should be taught and encouraged to do simple research and exchange their findings with colleagues in developed countries.

Nurturing the development of school libraries in all countries. We need to play a more proactive role to ensure the development of school libraries. We should not expect interested parties to approach us, rather we should 'sell' our message to anyone who is willing to listen to us. The focus of our attention must change from a few selected countries who are interested in what we do, to all the 200+ nations of the world. There are many countries who do not have even the basic library facilities, and who may not even be aware of the many potentialities of libraries. A strategic action plan for the advancement of school libraries in all nations needs to be urgently developed as a priority. This plan must encompass all areas that need attention, including official policies, funding, physical facilities, personnel, education, collections, etc. Other development agencies must at the same time be encouraged to include the development of school libraries as part of their development efforts.

It is hoped that the findings and the recommendations in this paper can be used as a starting point in the efforts to improve the school libraries internationally and, in turn, the quality of education worldwide.

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APPENDIX A

Countries which Responded to the Survey

1. Austria
2. Bahrain
3. Barbados
4. Belarus
5. Belgium
6. Belize
7. Botswana
8. Bulgaria
9. Burundi
10. Chile
11. Croatia
12. Czech Republic
13. Denmark
14. Dominica
15. Dominican Republic
16. El Salvador
17. Estonia
18. Ethiopia
19. Fiji
20. Finland
21. France
22. Germany
23. Grenada
24. Italy
25. Jamaica
26. Jordan
27. Latvia
28. Lesotho
29. Liechtenstein
30. Lithuania
31. Luxembourg
32. Malawi
33. Malaysia
34. Malta
35. Monaco
36. Namibia
37. Netherlands
38. New Zealand
39. Nicaragua
40. Niger
41. Norway
42. Pakistan
43. Panama
44. Papua New Guinea
45. Philippines
46. Poland
47. Qatar
48. St. Lucia
49. St. Vincent & Grenadines
50. Senegal
51. Sierra Leone
52. Singapore
53. Slovakia
54. South Korea
55. Sri Lanka
56. Swaziland
57. Sweden
58. Thailand
59. Tonga
60. Trinidad and Tobago
61. Uganda
62. United Arab Emirates
63. United Kingdom
64. Zambia